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TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

ON

FEMA DISASTER RESPONSE

THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 15, 2007

Good Morning Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member King. I am the Director of the Alabama Emergency Management Agency, a position I have held for the last four years. Prior to that I served 24 years with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and four and a half years with the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. I have spent the last thirty-two years working over a hundred Presidential disasters and emergency declarations to include the Oklahoma City Bombing, events of 9/11, and being involved in the decision making process on several hundred requests for declarations. I am here to talk to you today about Alabama's recent experiences with disaster response and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

On March the first of this year, tornadoes ripped through the State of Alabama causing ten deaths and damaging hundreds of homes and public buildings over a six county area.

At 12:30 pm a tornado struck the community of Miller's Ferry killing one individual and damaging or destroying 76 homes. Later that afternoon at 1:47 pm another tornado struck the town of Enterprise in Coffee County destroying the Enterprise High School killing eight students, damaging or destroying 716 homes, and killing an elderly woman. Additionally, 50 homes were damaged or destroyed in Henry County.

We activated our emergency operations center (EOC) at 9:00am on March 1, 2007 in preparation for severe weather. As soon as reports began to come in, we dispatched emergency personnel to the affected counties to assist in response and recovery efforts. Over three hundred and fifty state personnel from twelve state agencies (Alabama Emergency Management, Department of Public Safety, Department of Forestry, Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, Department of Environmental Management, Department of Human Resources, Alcohol and Beverage Commission, Insurance Commission, State Fire Marshal's Office, Department of Transportation, the National Guard and Department of Public Health) responded to the affected area immediately. We also activated the Alabama Mutual Aid System and dispatched two heavy rescue teams (from Dothan and Mobile Fire and Rescue Departments) and a Disaster Mortuary Team (from Cullman County). These agencies assisted the stricken jurisdictions with search and

rescue, debris removal, emergency communications, security, traffic control and damage assessment.

At 3:00 pm on March the first, Governor Bob Riley declared a State of Emergency. As soon as the damage reports began to come in the FEMA Regional Director (Major Phillip May) was on the phone with me asking what type of assistance we might need. The Acting Director of the FEMA Transitional Recovery Office in Montgomery, Alabama (Robert Ives) was dispatched to our EOC to function as the FEMA liaison. At 7:05 pm I contacted FEMA Director David Paulison and reported the extent of our damages as known at that time. Director Paulison stated to let him know what was needed from FEMA as soon as possible. Later that evening we requested helicopter support from FEMA to assist in damage assessment. The next day when damage assessment operations began, Governor Bob Riley, State School Superintendent Dr. Joseph B. Morton, Congressman Terry Everett and myself toured the damaged areas and met with key city, county and state officials in Coffee and Wilcox counties. At 3:47 pm that same day (March 2) Governor Riley submitted a request for an expedited Major Disaster Declaration to the President (through the FEMA Regional Director) for Coffee, Dallas, Henry, Lowndes and Wilcox Counties. The request included the Individual Assistance, Public Assistance, and Mitigation Assistance programs. On March the 3rd at 9:00 am, the President while touring the damages in Enterprise announced that he had approved the Major Disaster declaration for Coffee County for the individual assistance program. Joint Federal and State damage assessment continued throughout March 3, 4 and 5 in the effected counties. On March 6, Dale, Henry, Wilcox and Coffee counties were added to the declaration for the Public Assistance Program.

In my experience, I know how the disaster declaration process works and how FEMA should and can respond to a disaster. FEMA has been nothing short of responsive to the needs of the citizens of the State of Alabama and Director Paulison has personally contacted me during disasters to ensure that the state has the resources necessary to meet the immediate needs of disaster victims. One of the first concerns that emergency managers around the country had when FEMA was included in the Department of Homeland Security was how the disaster declaration and relief process would work. While that process has changed a little because of FEMA's inclusion in the Department, I do not believe it has resulted in any delays that have impacted the State of Alabama.

Attachment 1

	<u>Ivan</u>	<u>Dennis</u>	<u>Katrina</u>
1. When disaster occurred	9/13/04	7/10/05	8/29/05
2. When Governor issued proclamation	9/13/04	7/08/05	8/28/05
3. When we requested declaration from FEMA	9/15/04	7/09/05	8/29/05
4. When it was granted	9/15/04	7/10/05	8/29/05